



MONTANA LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

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DATE: November 17, 2005

TO: The Legislative Finance Committee

FROM: Shane Sierer, Associate Fiscal Analyst

RE: State of Preparedness for a Pandemic Influenza Outbreak

The purpose of this report is to provide the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) with an opportunity to discuss the level of preparedness for an avian influenza outbreak.

BACKGROUND

Bird flu is an infection caused by avian (bird) flu viruses. These flu viruses are a natural occurrence among wild birds. Avian flu is not contagious to humans and is very difficult for humans to become infected, but about 63 people worldwide have died of avian flu since 2003 or about 50 percent of those infected. Because of the extremely high mortality rate, mutation of the virus to one that can spread from human to human has caused great concern across the globe. As a result, the State of Montana has drafted a response plan for an influenza outbreak following Center for Disease Control guidelines.

Recently there has been an outbreak of the avian flu among poultry in eight countries in Asia. At the time of the outbreak, there have been over 200 million birds that have either died from the disease or were killed in order to try to control the outbreak.

HOW ARE INFECTIONS WITH AVIAN FLU TREATED AND WHAT IF ANY ARE THE PROTECTIONS FROM INFECTIONS?

Currently there is not a commercially available vaccine offering protection from the avian influenza virus. The National Institute of Health has developed a prototype vaccine for the avian flu strain and the Department of Defense (DOD) currently has about 200,000 doses stockpiled. The DOD expects by the end of 2006 they will have over ten million doses of that vaccine, which will be available to the military and first responders in case of an outbreak of avian flu. The United States, along with almost every other country in the world, is also stockpiling Tamiflu at this time, which appears to be the best available medicine for combating flu symptoms. However, according to Michael Leavitt, secretary of the federal Department of Health and Human Services, the United States will only have about 20 million doses each of the flu vaccine and Tamiflu by the end of 2006 and should have available 80 million doses of each by the end of 2007, or about 25 percent of the total population by the end of 2007.

WHAT IS THE STATE OF MONTANA DOING TO PREPARE FOR A POSSIBLE H5N1 FLU PANDEMIC?

The Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) has prepared a draft plan for a pandemic influenza outbreak. This response plan is to be used in conjunction with the Human Disease/Public Health Emergency Plan, the Mass Vaccination/Prophylaxis Plan, the Isolation and Quarantine Plan, and the DPHHS Risk Communications Plan.

The pandemic response plan is designed to layout the groundwork for an emergency response. The goals and objectives of the response plan is to:

1. Limit or slow the spread of an influenza outbreak in the State of Montana.
2. Mitigate the disease by easing the suffering and the number of deaths.
3. Sustain the infrastructure and mitigating the impacts of the outbreak upon society.

DPHHS states the Montana Influenza Pandemic Response Plan must be considered a “work in progress,” that will be updated when new information and guidelines from the World Health Organization or Center for Disease Control are available.

ISSUES AND DECISIONS POINTS FOR LFC CONSIDERATION

Several questions have been put to the department to address at the LFC meeting.

- Is the infrastructure already in place able to deal with a health emergency?
- Has the influenza response plan been tested in real-world type situations?
- When and if a disease outbreak occurs, who will receive the vaccine for avian flu?
- How prepared are our county hospitals and rural health centers for a disease outbreak?
- Is the response plan able to address gaps in procedures for responders who fall ill to an outbreak?

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